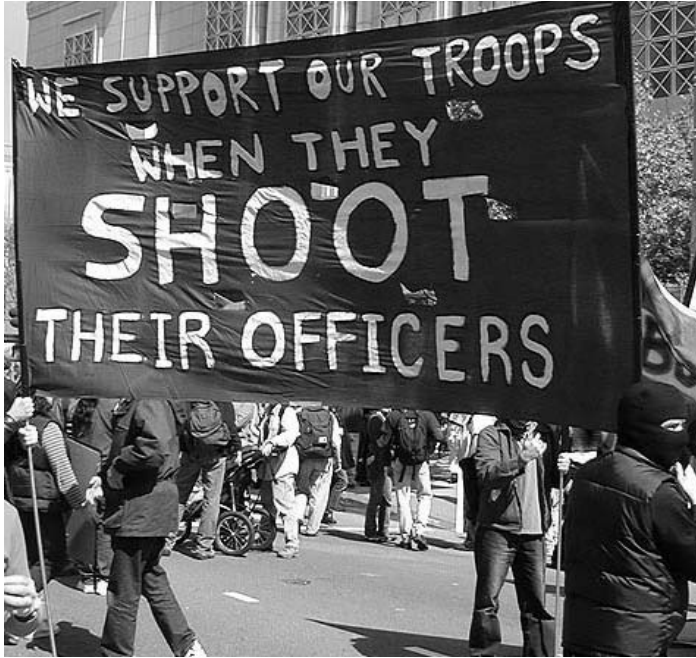


HARRASS THE BRASS

MUTINY, FRAGGING AND DESERTIONS IN THE U.S. MILITARY

By Kevin Keating

A friend who was in the US military during the Persian Gulf War told me that when George Bush visited the troops in Saudi Arabia before the war, many enlisted men and women in Bush's immediate vicinity had their rifle and pistol ammunition taken away. The bolts were also removed from their rifles. If this was so, it makes it clear that Bush and his corporate handlers may have been afraid of the US enlisted people who Bush would soon be killing in his unsuccessful re-election campaign.



The suppressed history of the Vietnam war shows that the Commander-in-Chief had good reason to fear and distrust the troops. Our rulers want us to forget what happened during the Vietnam war, and they want us to forget what defeated their war effort - and the importance of the resistance to the war by enlisted men and women.

Until 1968 the desertion rate for US troops in Vietnam was lower than in previous wars. But by 1969 the desertion rate had increased fourfold. This wasn't limited to Southeast Asia; desertion rates among GIs were on the increase world-wide. For soldiers in the combat zone, refusing to obey orders became an important part of avoiding horrible injury or death. As early as mid-1969, an entire company of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade sat down on the battlefield. Later that year, a rifle company from the famed 1st Air Cavalry Division flatly refused - on CBS TV - to advance down a dangerous trail. In the following 12 months the 1st Air Cav notched up 35 combat refusals.

From mild forms of political protest and disobedience of war orders, the resistance among the ground troops grew into a massive and widespread "quasi-mutiny" by 1970 and 1971. Soldiers went on "search and avoid" missions, intentionally skirting clashes with the Vietnamese and often holding three-day-long pot parties instead of fighting.

By 1970, the Army had 65,643 deserters, roughly the equivalent of four infantry divisions.

In an article published in the Armed Forces Journal (June 7, 1971), Marine Colonel Robert D. Heintz Jr., a veteran combat commander with over 27 years experience in the Marines and author of *Soldiers Of The Sea*, a definitive history of the Marine Corps, wrote: "Our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and noncommissioned officers..."

Heintz cited a New York Times article which quoted an enlisted man saying, "The American garrisons on the larger bases are virtually disarmed. The lifers have taken our weapons away...there have also been quite a few frag incidents in the battalion."

"Frag incidents" or "fraggings" was soldier slang in Vietnam for the killing of strict, unpopular and aggressive officers and NCO's. The word apparently originated from enlisted men using fragmentation grenades to off commanders.

Heintz wrote, "Bounties, raised by common subscription in amounts running anywhere from \$50 to \$1,000, have been widely reported put on the heads of leaders who the privates and SP4s want to rub out."

Shortly after the costly assault on Hamburger Hill in mid-1969, the GI underground newspaper in Vietnam, *GI Says*, publicly offered a \$10,000 bounty on Lieutenant Colonel Weldon Hunnicutt, the officer who ordered and led the attack.

"The Pentagon has now disclosed that fraggings in 1970 (209 killings) have more than doubled those of the previous year (96 killings). Word of the deaths of officers will bring cheers at troop movies or in bivouacs of certain units."

Congressional hearings on fraggings held in 1973 estimated that roughly 3% of officer and non-com deaths in Vietnam between 1961 and 1972 were a result of fraggings. But these figures were only for killings committed with grenades, and didn't include officer deaths from automatic weapons fire, handguns and knifings(!). The Army's Judge Advocate General's Corps estimated that only 10% of fragging attempts resulted in anyone going to trial.

In the Americal Division, plagued by poor morale, fraggings during 1971 were estimated to be running around one a week. War equipment was sabotaged and destroyed. By 1972 roughly 300 anti-war and anti-military newspapers, with names like *Harass the Brass*, *All Hands Abandon Ship* and *Star Spangled Bummer* had been put out by enlisted people.

"In Vietnam," wrote the Ft. Lewis-McCord Free Press, "The Lifers, the Brass, are the true enemy...."

Riots and anti-war demonstrations took place on bases in Asia, Europe and in the United States. By the early 1970s the government had to begin pulling out of the ground war and switching to an "air war" in part because many of the ground troops who were supposed to do the fighting were hamstringing the world's mightiest military force by their sabotage and resistance.

With the shifting over to an "air war" strategy, the Navy became an important source of resistance to the war. In response to the racism that prevailed inside the Navy, black and white sailors occasionally rebelled together. The most significant of these rebellions took place on board the USS *Constellation* off Southern California in November 1972. In response to a threat of less-than-honorable discharges against several black sailors, a group of over 100 black and white sailors staged a day-and-a-half long sit-in. Fearful of losing control of his ship at sea to

full-scale mutiny, the ship's commander brought the *Constellation* back to San Diego.

One hundred thirty-two sailors were allowed to go ashore. They refused orders to reboard the ship several days later, staging a defiant dockside strike on the morning of November 9. In spite of the seriousness of the rebellion, not one of the sailors involved was arrested.

Sabotage was an extremely useful tactic. On May 26, 1970, the USS *Anderson* was preparing to steam from San Diego to Vietnam. But someone had dropped nuts, bolts and chains down the main gear shaft. A major breakdown occurred, resulting in thousands of dollars worth of damage and a delay of several weeks. Several sailors were charged, but because of a lack of evidence the case was dismissed.

With the escalation of naval involvement in the war the level of sabotage grew. In July of 1972, within the space of three weeks, two of the Navy's aircraft carriers were put out of commission by sabotage. On July 10, a massive fire swept through the admiral's quarters and radar center of the USS *Forestal*, causing over \$7 million in damage. This delayed the ship's deployment for over two months.

In late July, the USS *Ranger* was docked at Alameda, California. Just days before the ship's scheduled departure for Vietnam, a paint-scraper and two 12-inch bolts were inserted into the number-four-engine reduction gears causing nearly \$1 million in damage and forcing a three-and-a-half month delay in operations for extensive repairs. The sailor charged in the case was acquitted. In other cases, sailors tossed equipment over the sides of ships while at sea.

The House Armed Services Committee summed up the crisis of rebellion in the Navy:

"The US Navy is now confronted with pressures...which, if not controlled, will surely destroy its enviable tradition of discipline. Recent instances of sabotage, riot, willful disobedience of orders, and contempt for authority...are clear-cut symptoms of a dangerous deterioration of discipline."

Resistance to the war effort by men in uniform was a product of circumstances favorable to revolt. A civilian anti-war movement in the US had emerged on the coat-tails of the civil rights movement, at a time when the pacifism-at-any-price tactics of civil rights leaders had reached their effective limit, and were being questioned by a younger generation of activists. Working class blacks and Latinos served in combat units out of all proportion to their numbers in American society, and major urban riots in Watts, Detroit and Newark had an explosive effect on the consciousness of many of these men. After the assassination of Martin Luther King major riots erupted in 181 US cities; the rulers of the United States were facing the gravest national crisis since the Civil War. And the radical movement of the late 1960's was an international phenomenon not limited to the US. There was revolt everywhere, even against the Maoists in China; its high point was the wildcat general strike that shut down France in May, 1968, the last time a major industrialized democracy came close to revolution.

The relationship between officers and enlisted people mirrors the relationship between bosses and employees, and similar dynamics of class conflict emerge in the military and civilian versions of the workplace. The military is never a hermetically sealed organization. The armed forces are vulnerable to social forces at work in the larger society that spawns them. Revolt in civilian society bleeds through the fabric of the military into the ranks of enlisted people.

Ten years ago, in an article in *Mother Jones* magazine, corporate liberal historian and New Leftover Todd Gitlin claimed that the US anti-war movement of the Vietnam period was the most successful opposition to a war in history. Gitlin was dead wrong; as a bourgeois historian Gitlin

is paid to get it wrong. The most effective "anti-war" movement in history occurred at the end of World War One, when proletarian revolutions broke out in Russia, Germany and throughout Central Europe in 1917 and 1918, and a crucial factor in the revolutionary movement of that time was the collapse of the armies and navies of Russia and Germany in full-scale armed mutiny. After several years of war and millions of casualties the soldiers and sailors of opposing nations began to fraternize with each other, turned their guns against their officers and went home to fight against the ruling classes that had sent them into the war. The war ended with a global cycle of mutinies mirroring the social unrest spreading across the capitalist world. The naval bases Kronstadt in Russia and Kiel and Wilhelmshaven in Germany became important centers of revolutionary self-organization and action, and the passing of vast numbers of armed soldiers and sailors to the side of the Soviets allowed the working class to briefly take power in Russia. The French invasion of Revolutionary Russia in 1919 and 1920 was crippled by the mutiny of the French fleet in the Black Sea, centered around the battleships France and the Jean Bart. Mutinies broke out among sailors in the British Navy and in the armies of the British empire in Asia, and even among American troops sent to aid the counter-revolutionary White Army in the Russian Civil War.

Organized revolutionary mutiny doesn't happen in every war, but it occurs more frequently than military historians generally acknowledge. One of the most significant naval mutinies in history occurred in the Spanish Navy in July 1936, at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. In response to massive working class unrest, the Spanish military launched a coup d'etat led by Francisco Franco. Franco's army was to invade Spain from North Africa with the aid of ships of the Spanish Navy. But a majority of Spanish sailors were class-conscious socialists and anarchists, and these men planned a coordinated revolt in response. After several days of ship-board combat the sailors won. This almost broke the back of Franco's coup attempt. A later study by the Spanish Republican government estimated that 70% of the Naval officer corps was killed in the mutiny.

The crisis that racked American society during the Vietnam war was a grave crisis for what has been a historically very stable society, but it wasn't profound enough to create an irreparable rupture between the rulers and the ruled, or give rise to a full-fledged revolutionary crisis. The US was still coasting on the relative prosperity of the post-World War Two economic boom. Life wasn't as bad for as many people as it is now, and that's why US involvement in a similar protracted ground war, in Colombia or Mexico for example, could have a much more explosive impact on American society in the near future. History shows that a conscript or draftee army is more prey to sedition than an all-volunteer force. This might be one reason that all-volunteer armed forces are becoming the norm for the world's major industrialized democracies.

It's an ugly fact that war and revolution were intimately linked in the most far-going social movements of the 20th century. With the US governments' self-appointed role as the global policeman for capitalist law and order, it 's likely that the crisis that will be necessary to cause an irreparable break between the rulers and the ruled in the United States will come from a war. It will be a war the US can't quickly win or walk away from, a war they can't fight with a proxy army like the Nicaraguan Contras, a war with a devastating impact on the civilian populace of the US: a minimum of 5,000

Americans coming home in plastic bags. Protracted civil unrest or full-scale revolution in Mexico is one situation that could give rise to this. At that point widespread fraternization between anti-capitalist radicals and enlisted people will be crucial in bringing an end to this nightmarish social

order.1

An examination of what happened to the US military during the Vietnam War can help us understand the central role the "the military question" will play in a future revolutionary struggle. It isn't a question of how a chaotic and rebellious civilian populace can out-gun the well-organized, disciplined armies of the capitalist state in pitched battle, but of how this mass movement can cripple the effective fighting capacity of the military, and bring about the collapse and dispersal of the state's armed forces. What set of circumstances can compel the inchoate discontentment endemic in any wartime army or navy to advance to the level of conscious organized resistance? How fast and how deeply can a subversive consciousness spread among enlisted people? How can rebels in uniform take effective, large-scale action against the military machine? This will involve the sabotage and destruction of sophisticated military technologies, an irreversible breakdown in the chain-of-command, and a terminal demoralization of the officer corps. Circumstances must make it clear to officers that they are fighting a losing war, and that their physical safety can best be guaranteed if they give up, surrender their weapons and run away. The "quasi-mutiny" that helped defeat the US in Vietnam offers a significant precedent for the kind of subversive action revolutionaries will have to help foment in the fight against 21st century capitalism.

As Capital's global dictatorship causes living conditions to deteriorate for the majority of humanity, working class troops will be given an expanding role in suppressing the rebellions of other working class people. The use of US armed forces during the Los Angeles riots in the spring of 1992 was a taste of the military's likely future domestic role in maintaining this exploitative social order. But the forces that lead to mass rebellion in one area of the globe will also give rise to rebellions in other parts of the globe; our rulers' power and their economy can be collapsed from within by the working class women and men whom they depend on.



Information for this article has been taken from the book *Soldiers in Revolt*, by David Cortright, published by the Institute for Policy Studies, the pamphlet *Mutinies* by David Lamb, which may be available from AK Press Distribution in San Francisco, and various issues of the Detroit, Michigan anarchist newspaper *The Fifth Estate*. Information on the Spanish Civil War is taken from *The Spanish Revolution: The left and the struggle for power*, by Burnett Bolletin.

And the US Army's Psychological Operations manual is quite useful - find copies of this last one if you can!

Readers should please send copies of this article to any enlisted people they know.

Notes

1. A few far-sighted individuals among the U.S. political elite apparently fear that U.S. involvement in a ground war could trigger large-scale domestic unrest.

According to *Newsweek* magazine, at a meeting in the White House during President Clinton's intervention in the Balkans, a heated exchange took place between Madeleine Albright, then ambassador to the United Nations, and then-National Security Adviser Colin Powell.

Newsweek gives the following confusing and semi-coherent account:

"...Powell steadfastly resisted American involvement. He initially opposed even air drops of food, fearing that these would fail and that U.S. Army ground troops would inevitably be sucked in. His civilian bosses, who suspected him of padding the numbers when asked how many U.S. troops would be required, grew impatient.

At one meeting, Madeleine Albright, then ambassador to the United Nations, famously confronted Powell.

"What's the point of having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it?" she demanded. In his memoirs, Powell recalled that he told Albright that GIs were "not toy soldiers to be moved around on some sort of global game board."

An official who witnessed the exchange told NEWSWEEK that Powell also said something quite revealing that has not been reported.

"You would see this wonderful society destroyed," the general angrily told Albright. It was clear, said this official, that Powell was referring to his beloved Army."

("Colin Powell: Behind the Myth," by Evan Thomas and John Berry, Newsweek, March 5th, 2001)

Colin Powell was a junior officer in the fragging-plagued Americal Division during the Vietnam War. On numerous occasions, Powell has said that the US defeat in Vietnam was the main influence on the way he sees the world. Powell clearly understands that the armed forces are a function of the larger civilian society that spawns them.

Was Colin Powell speaking about the US Army -- or about US society itself with his comment about seeing "this wonderful society destroyed?" You be the judge!

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STATEMENT TO THE TROOPS

We are veterans of the United States armed forces. We stand with the majority of humanity, including millions in our own country, in opposition to the United States' all out war on Iraq. We span many wars and eras, have many political views and we all agree that this war is wrong. Many of us believed serving in the military was our duty, and our job was to defend this country. Our experiences in the military caused us to question much of what we were taught. Now we see our REAL duty is to encourage you as members of the U.S. armed forces to find out what you are being sent to fight and die for and what the consequences of your actions will be for humanity. We call upon you, the active duty and reservists, to follow your conscience and do the right thing.

In the last Gulf War, as troops, we were ordered to murder from a safe distance. We destroyed much of Iraq from the air, killing hundreds of thousands, including civilians. We remember the road to Basra -- the Highway of Death -- where we were ordered to kill fleeing Iraqis. We bulldozed trenches, burying people alive. The use of depleted uranium weapons left the battlefields radioactive. Massive use of pesticides, experimental drugs, burning chemical weapons depots and oil fires combined to create a toxic cocktail affecting both the Iraqi people and Gulf War veterans today. One in four Gulf War veterans is disabled.

During the Vietnam War we were ordered to destroy Vietnam from the air and on the ground. At My Lai we massacred over 500 women, children and old men. This was not an aberration, it's how we fought the war. We used Agent Orange on the enemy and then experienced first hand its effects. We know what Post Traumatic Stress Disorder looks, feels and tastes like because the ghosts of over two million men, women and children still haunt our dreams. More of us took our own lives after returning home than died in battle.

If you choose to participate in the invasion of Iraq you will be part of an occupying army. Do you know what it is like to look into the eyes of a people that hate you to your core? You should think about what your "mission" really is. You are being sent to invade and occupy a people who, like you and me, are only

trying to live their lives and raise their kids. They pose no threat to the United States even though they have a brutal dictator as their leader. Who is the U.S. to tell the Iraqi people how to run their country when many in the U.S. don't even believe their own President was legally elected?

Saddam is being vilified for gassing his own people and trying to develop weapons of mass destruction. However, when Saddam committed his worst crimes the U.S. was supporting him. This support included providing the means to produce chemical and biological weapons. Contrast this with the horrendous results of the U.S. led economic sanctions. More than a million Iraqis, mainly children and infants, have died because of these sanctions. After having destroyed the entire infrastructure of their country including hospitals, electricity generators, and water treatment plants, the U.S. then, with the sanctions, stopped the import of goods, medicines, parts, and chemicals necessary to restore even the most basic necessities of life.

There is no honor in murder. This war is murder by another name. When, in an unjust war, an errant bomb dropped kills a mother and her child it is not "collateral damage," it is murder. When, in an unjust war, a child dies of dysentery because a bomb damaged a sewage treatment plant, it is not "destroying enemy infrastructure," it is murder. When, in an unjust war, a father dies of a heart attack because a bomb disrupted the phone lines so he could not call an ambulance, it is not "neutralizing command and control facilities," it is murder. When, in an unjust war, a thousand poor farmer conscripts die in a trench defending a town they have lived in their whole lives, it is not victory, it is murder.

There will be veterans leading protests against this war on Iraq and your participation in it. During the Vietnam War thousands in Vietnam and in the U.S. refused to follow orders.

Many resisted and

rebelled. Many became conscientious objectors and others went to prison rather than bear arms against the so-called enemy. During the last Gulf War many GIs resisted in various ways and for many different reasons. Many of us came out of these wars and joined with the anti-war movement.

If the people of the world are ever to be free, there must come a time when being a citizen of the world takes precedence over being the soldier of a nation. Now is that time. When orders come to ship out, your response will profoundly impact the lives of millions of people in the Middle East and here at home. Your response will help set the course of our future. You will have choices all along the way. Your commanders want you to obey. We urge you to think. We urge you to make your choices based on your conscience. If you choose to resist, we will support you and stand with you because we have come to understand that our REAL duty is to the people of the world and to our common future.

from www.calltoconscience.net



Support the Troops **That Refused**

RESOURCES FOR MILITARY RESISTERS

GI Rights Hotline

Completely free. Call here if you want to get out or if you're thinking twice about enlisting. Call (800) FYI-95GI or go to www.girights.org

The Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors

CCCO supports and promotes individual and collective resistance to war and preparations for war. www.objector.org/

The Anti-Warrior

A newspaper published by GI-resisters in the 1st Gulf War. <http://jeff.paterson.net/aw.htm>

Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors

www.objector.org



Other stuff:

Mid Atlantic Infoshop- A huge resource oif information on anarchism and anti-capitalist struggles: infoshop.org. Also check out war.infoshop.org

Ecodefense - A manual for direct action and sabotage by experienced ecological saboteurs. Methods can be used virtually anywhere. Available at decent independent bookstores.

Indymedia - Independent media from toots activists against war and corporate rule. - indymedia.org

Protest Net - Find out where to hook up with the anti-war movement. - protest.net

the defenestrator

A newspaper by Philadelphia anti-warriors and anarchists, documenting local struggles and encouraging a society based on freedom, mutual aid and solidarity. We're also the ones who put out this pamphlet.

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